

Walter's Story

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It's nice to see CBS's "60 Minutes" in prime time, and last Sunday's effort, with Wallace, Safer, and Rather was excellent. But I'm afraid the CBS probers will have to tighten up their act a little. Quite apart from the fiasco of the bogus Hoffa informant, to whom they paid \$10,000, there is the matter of the CBS investigations into President Kennedy's assassination.

One of the most convincing portions of the CBS investigations was the allegation of William Walter. We were shown Dan Rather interviewing Walter, who is now a banker in Louisiana. Walter said that he had been an FBI agent at the time of Kennedy's assassination and that on November 17, 1963, five days before the shooting in Dallas, he had seen a teletype from FBI headquarters warning that the agency had information an assassination attempt might occur on November 22 or 23 in Dallas, and that FBI field officers should make every effort to locate informants to harden up the story. Walter even displayed what he said was his transcription of the FBI message he said he had made at the time. CBS quoted a blanket denial from the FBI but left the firm impression in the viewer's mind that an FBI cover-up might be in progress, and that this crucial note had been "lost" or destroyed in the manner of Oswald's famous threatening note to agent Hosty in Dallas.

It was very impressive stuff—probably the most doubt-arousing section of the whole broadcast. But Walter is not nearly so convincing as the CBS made out. Hugh Aynesworth, one of the most sober and persistent of all the Texan reporters who have investigated the assassination stories over the years, had been looking into Walter's allegations shortly before the CBS researchers arrived on the scene. Working for the Dallas Times Herald along with his colleague Bob Dudney, he had conducted 60 or 70 interviews, visited Walter in Louisiana, and talked with him "a couple of dozen

times." Walter had submitted to a polygraph in Dallas organized by Aynesworth, but agreed to answer only two questions. The test was "inconclusive" and even leaned toward failure. Walter turned out not to be an FBI agent, as he claimed, but a clerk. He also changed his story about the teletype, first saying he had a duplicate of the original, then denying it. He had backed out of similar allegations in the late '60s. Aynesworth and Dudney went further, pressing the FBI to come up with some convincing rebuttal to Walter's allegations. Finally Deputy Associate Director of the FBI James Adams held a conference call with William Walter, with Tom Johnson, publisher of the Dallas Times Herald, on the line. He said that the Justice Department had agreed to give Walter total immunity, in case he was afraid of subsequent FBI prosecution for leaking confidential communications. Walter, despite this conference call, later claimed that he could not show the actual carbon copy of the teletype as he would "be in trouble for it." Aynesworth also told me that Walter's credibility among his former friends and associates was extremely low. He and Dudney decided not to run the story.

During those investigations CBS researchers contacted them, and so did Rather himself, excitedly asking for background on Walter. They were told that Aynesworth and Dudney did not believe in Walter, also about the polygraph and Walter's offer of immunity from the Justice Department. But the CBS team, with Rather in the lead, pressed on to Louisiana, interviewed Walter for four hours, and were so excited they allegedly chartered a plane from New Orleans to New York to carry back the vital interview. About four and a half minutes finally appeared on the CBS program. Featured as if there were an 80 per cent chance Walter's vital allegation was true.

In response to this, Aynesworth and Dudney finally ran a long and convincing critique of Walter's claim in the Dallas Times Herald. Very edifying for the people of Dallas, but not for those other viewers of CBS who might think that Walter had possession of one of the most damaging pieces of evidence of conspiracy and possible FBI foreknowledge of the assassination.